

Mr. Chairman, I am delighted to be with you here in San Mateo again following up the hearing we conducted in August of last year. Thank you for once again agreeing to convene this subcommittee in California, where the national problem of poorly-secured high explosives first came to light.

Before we begin, I want to commend you for your diligence and commitment on this issue. For those who are not familiar with Chairman Shay's reputation, he is known in Washington as a fair person, committed to policy rather than partisanship. His role as Chairman of this subcommittee is complemented by his membership on the Homeland Security Committee.

Last year's hearing raised as many, if not more questions than it answered. Today we will hear from some of the same witnesses, and I hope that we have more answers today than we did 14 months ago.

Today we will learn the result of a study by the Government Accountability Office that we commissioned a year ago, and that has just been completed. This study, along with the testimony of today's witnesses, will be instrumental in ensuring that the legislation Mr. Shays and I will introduce a short time from now is based on the most recent data.

The chilling implications of last summer's theft from a poorly-secured law enforcement storage shed were horrifically illustrated this past July, when terrorists attacked the London transportation system. Immediately after hearing the news of the bombings, I rode BART to show my support for the safety of the Bay area transit system. And while the terrorists who bombed the London subway used homemade devices, I can't help but wonder how much more destructive their actions would have been had they been able to arm themselves with high-strength plastic explosives stolen from a law enforcement agency bunker.

At the hearing 14 months ago, the overwhelming response to our questions was "we don't know." We don't know how many public facilities, un-inspected by the ATF for safety and security precautions, exist in our country. We don't know how much explosive material is stored at these facilities. That answer was unacceptable then and it most certainly will not wash now, after 14 months of opportunity to discover the answers.

Mr. Chairman, our country is still very much in the midst of the war on terrorism that began September 11, 2001. Sometimes we are reminded of it dramatically -- a bomb scare shuts down a tunnel, or a raised alert level puts a city on edge. While such episodes tend to dominate our attention, we should not underestimate the dogged vigilance needed every day so that in this struggle, we will prevail. Thieves should not be allowed to raid stockpiles of high explosives right in our backyard to sell them to the highest bidder. Uniform standards for safeguarding such materials must be established and enforced.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. I also want to thank the witnesses for agreeing to share their perspectives on this important topic, and I look forward to hearing their views.